

Teaching Copyright Beyond Campus: Academic Librarians at Pop Culture Conventions

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Abstract

Academic librarianship has long emphasized campus-based instruction, but transformative learning opportunities often emerge beyond the classroom. This article explores how two librarians extended copyright education into the unconventional setting of multigenre pop culture conventions. Originally developed for faculty, their workshops were redesigned to meet the needs of artists, cosplayers, small business owners, and independent creators seeking practical, legally grounded information about copyright, fair use, and intellectual property. Drawing from real-world interactions, iterative feedback, and instructional theory – including a revised “Informative Avocado” model – the authors describe how their outreach not only empowered new learner communities, but also revitalized their own teaching practices. The article argues that getting creative with finding new audiences for instruction can deepen pedagogical insight and reconnect librarianship with public service, offering a blueprint for reinvigorating outreach through experimentation, responsiveness, and reengagement.

Keywords: library instruction, multigenre conventions, creative instruction practices, copyright instruction

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Introduction

Most academic libraries don't have a dedicated copyright librarian with a law degree. In fact, only about 30% of law librarians hold a Juris Doctor (JD) degree (American Association of Law Libraries, 2025), and that percentage is even lower in non-law academic settings. The figure can come as a surprise to some, but as Young (2012) writes, "we are librarians who work in law, not lawyers who work in libraries" (p. 7).

In the absence of a JD, libraries typically find someone who takes on the familiar faculty fair use and author's rights questions as part of their subject area. Through self-selection based on interest and various professional development strategies, a research and instruction librarian can develop the ability to connect people to relevant legal information and provide workshops about things like fair use (Appendix B).

We are two such librarians. Neither of us hold law degrees, but we've spent years building a working knowledge of copyright through conferences, self-study, institutional programs, online certificates, and reading (for a more detailed discussion of this, see Appendix C). We began collaborating in Fall 2021 to develop and lead faculty workshops on copyright, Creative Commons (CC), and open access at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. These efforts were supported by campus partners including the Office of Digital Learning and the Center for Faculty Excellence – both of which provided us with valuable platforms to reach instructors and promote our sessions.

At the same time, we were both in search of a way to "freshen up" our docket of information literacy instruction for this area. Initially, our motivation was primarily that we wanted a novel experience and we started looking around for other venues outside the university and tailored these presentations for new audiences.

Our search for an appropriate venue led us to pop culture conventions. These events, packed with fans and creators alike, provided an unexpected but ideal venue for outreach. Our first experience presenting at *Anime NebrasKon* in Council Bluffs revealed an eager audience: creators deeply invested in understanding copyright, but unsure where to begin. The response was so enthusiastic that we expanded our program and began submitting proposals to larger conventions.

In this article, we reflect on how we adapted our academic content for a general audience, what we learned along the way, and why we believe this type of outreach holds tremendous promise – not just for copyright education, but for reinvigorating librarianship. We aim to share both our process and our insights, so that other librarians

might consider stepping outside the traditional classroom and into less conventional but highly impactful spaces.

We acknowledge at this point that a fair question would be whether or not such a project falls within the traditionally stated job responsibilities of an academic librarian. And, strictly speaking...no, it doesn't. Obviously. What academic librarians have anime conventions as one of their subject areas?

However, University of Nebraska at Omaha is a Carnegie Community Engaged Campus. And we made the case that doing so would help us develop and try out new materials, delivery styles, and rethink how we organized our informational content, all while supporting that community-engaged mission. We were lucky in this regard to have immediate support from our supervisor at the library.

Pop Culture Conventions as Learning Spaces

To understand why pop culture conventions are an ideal venue for copyright education, it helps to first understand what these events are and who attends them. Also and interchangeably referred to as multigenre conventions, these gatherings celebrate a wide array of popular culture, including science fiction, fantasy, anime, comics, tabletop and video games, and film. Some conventions focus on a particular genre (e.g., *Anime NebrasKon*), while others encompass multiple fandoms under one roof.

A hallmark of these conventions is cosplay, short for "costume play," in which attendees dress as their favorite characters from media franchises or original creations. What began as a fan practice has grown into a vibrant creative culture. Cosplayers may build elaborate costumes by hand, hire professional fabricators, or monetize their designs through social media platforms and merchandise sales. But cosplay is only part of the picture—conventions also attract a wide range of independent creators, including artists, fan fiction writers, comic illustrators, small press publishers, YouTubers, podcasters, prop builders, game developers, and merchandise vendors. Many of these individuals operate as entrepreneurs or side hustlers, often with little formal exposure to copyright law despite routinely creating and distributing original or transformative work.

Importantly, many pop culture conventions are organized as 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations, which requires them to include educational programming as part of their mission (Internal Revenue Service, 2025). While the events are typically seen as entertainment-oriented, most host panels, workshops, and lectures on topics like media

studies, creative arts, science, and cultural analysis. Our idea was to add copyright to that list.

The environment was inherently learner-centered. Attendees voluntarily chose to attend educational panels. They arrived curious, asked thoughtful questions, and often stayed behind afterward to continue the conversation. In many ways, the energy and engagement far exceeded that of our traditional on-campus workshops. So, pop culture conventions provided an ideal setting to explore copyright education outside of academia. But reaching this new audience required more than a change of venue – it required rethinking how we structured, framed, and delivered our content.

From Faculty to Fandom: Adapting the Workshop

As de facto copyright subject area librarians, we regularly give faculty development workshops. In 2021, we partnered with campus offices such as the Center for Faculty Excellence and the Office of Digital Learning to lead sessions on topics including *Fair Use in the Classroom*, *Copyright Basics*, and *Open Educational Resources and Open Access*. These sessions were designed for university instructors and were typically structured as 60-minute lunchtime workshops, covering key copyright principles from a teaching and publishing perspective.

The idea for copyright workshops at pop culture conventions came about through discussions about doing something novel and outside of the box as an exercise in professional renewal. Isabel was invited to speak at the Chicago Comic and Entertainment Expo (C2E2) on a panel about libraries and fandom programming and noticed a clear interest in sessions that addressed the legal and ethical considerations of creative work. So, looking locally, Isabel submitted a proposal to present at *Anime NebrasKon*, a local multigenre convention in Council Bluffs, Iowa, doing a session titled *Copyright and Creative Commons for Creators*.

While Isabel had presented at multigenre conventions before, Craig's only experience in adapting presentations for an outside audience was running fake news inoculation workshops at public libraries instead of academic ones. Heading into the session, neither presenter was sure how many people would show up. And when over 60 attendees showed up for that first session – many in cosplay, notebooks in hand – it was clear that a need had been located. Attendees were eager for accessible copyright information. They wanted to know how to protect their work, how to avoid infringement, and how to interpret terms like “fair use” or “derivative work.” Their questions weren't hypothetical or academic – they were practical, personal, and often urgent.

These early sessions also revealed a key insight: our workshop, as originally structured, didn't fully meet the needs of this audience. Designed for faculty, the presentation assumed a baseline understanding of copyright and focused heavily on fair use and open licensing. But many convention attendees were starting from square one and asking about things we hadn't anticipated.

For instance, there was genuine surprise when we explained that copyright is automatic – that it doesn't require registration or a formal notice. Some attendees weren't sure what counted as "original work." Others asked about using brand logos, sampling music, selling fan art, or making parody content – all of which required us to quickly differentiate between copyright, trademark, and branding. The range and volume of questions made it clear: we needed to adapt. We did so over the course of several conventions in different states (Appendix A).

Over time, we restructured our content into two distinct parts: the first half focused on copyright fundamentals, including what copyright protects, how long it lasts, and how registration works. The second half addressed real-world applications, such as cosplay, fan fiction, and monetizing derivative work. We retained a brief overview of fair use and Creative Commons but scaled back those sections in favor of practical advice and resource sharing. We also added visual aids, real-life examples, and an expanded slide deck featuring key takeaways, useful links, and a newly developed "Best Practices for Creators" guide.

Refining through Feedback

The reception to our first convention sessions was unlike anything we had experienced in campus workshops. At *Anime NebrasKon*, more than 60 attendees filled the room – many in cosplay, some with notebooks or sketchpads in hand, and nearly all with questions. Faculty workshops are a quality over quantity enterprise. Presenting to five faculty members is actually a decent turnout – actually, preferred – and allows for ample in-depth discussion. That said, being greeted by more than 60 attendees was a bit surreal, especially considering we both tend to prefer local and regional conferences over the big nationals.

The second surprise was how engaged the attendees were. The questions they asked made it immediately clear that this audience brought a very different set of concerns and assumptions. While faculty were often focused on classroom fair use and publication rights, questions at the convention included:

- "Is it legal to sell my fan art if I change the character's design?"
- "Can I copyright my original D&D module?"

- “What happens if I use a company’s logo on my cosplay props?”
- “Does parody protect me if I remix a character in a funny way?”

What struck us was not just the volume or specificity of the questions, but the urgency behind them. These weren’t abstract inquiries – they were practical concerns from creators actively monetizing or distributing their work. Attendees followed us out of the room and we spent an hour answering questions in the hallway.

This level of engagement prompted a change in how we thought about our roles as presenters. Rather than simply delivering a lecture, we were facilitating a learning environment shaped by audience priorities. Every session provided opportunities for refinement. The questions we received informed the revisions we made before the next event. Some refinements were immediate – clarifying our slides, adding definitions, or revising visual aids. Others were structural, such as altering the order of topics or carving out more time for discussion.

We realized quickly that our existing structure, designed for academic audiences, didn’t quite fit. It assumed a level of foundational knowledge that many attendees didn’t have, and skipped over the very questions they needed answered most.

This feedback wasn’t just anecdotal. To better understand the learning needs of our new audience, we began distributing paper surveys at the end of each session. Rather than relying on emailed links (which often go ignored), we worked with a third person to hand out and collect the surveys in the room – yielding over 75 responses across three conventions. These surveys asked attendees to rate their confidence, note key takeaways, and suggest improvements.

Some highlights:

- 90% of respondents reported feeling more confident about copyright after the session.
- Many expressed surprise at foundational facts, like the automatic nature of copyright.
- Open-ended comments asked for more examples, clearer distinctions between legal terms, and more time.
- Two common requests were to make the session longer to talk about relevant examples and to include more handouts and suggestions for further reading

We expanded the format from 60 minutes to two hours, added a break midway through, and carved out more space for structured Q&A. While lengthening the session,

it also slowed down content, in line with research on cognitive load warning against over-packing short sessions (Sweller et al., 2019).

Based on observed interest levels, we also revised our content balance to spend less time on fair use and Creative Commons licensing – which had been heavily emphasized in faculty workshops – and more time on the basics: what copyright protects, how long it lasts, what counts as infringement, and how to register work.

We also introduced entirely new segments. Attendees needed help distinguishing copyright from trademark and branding, so we built slides specifically addressing those categories and included real-world examples from cosplay, merchandise, and fan fiction. In response to repeat questions like “How do I stay on the safe side?”, we developed a “Best Practices for Creators” slide with actionable tips. And because attendees consistently wanted resources, we added a second visual reference slide packed with creator-specific tools, legal clinics, and search guides.

Visual Tools and Takeaways

We introduced a series of vibrant, themed slides to reinforce our messages and provide take-home resources. Here are a few examples:

Figure 1
Useful Resources Slide

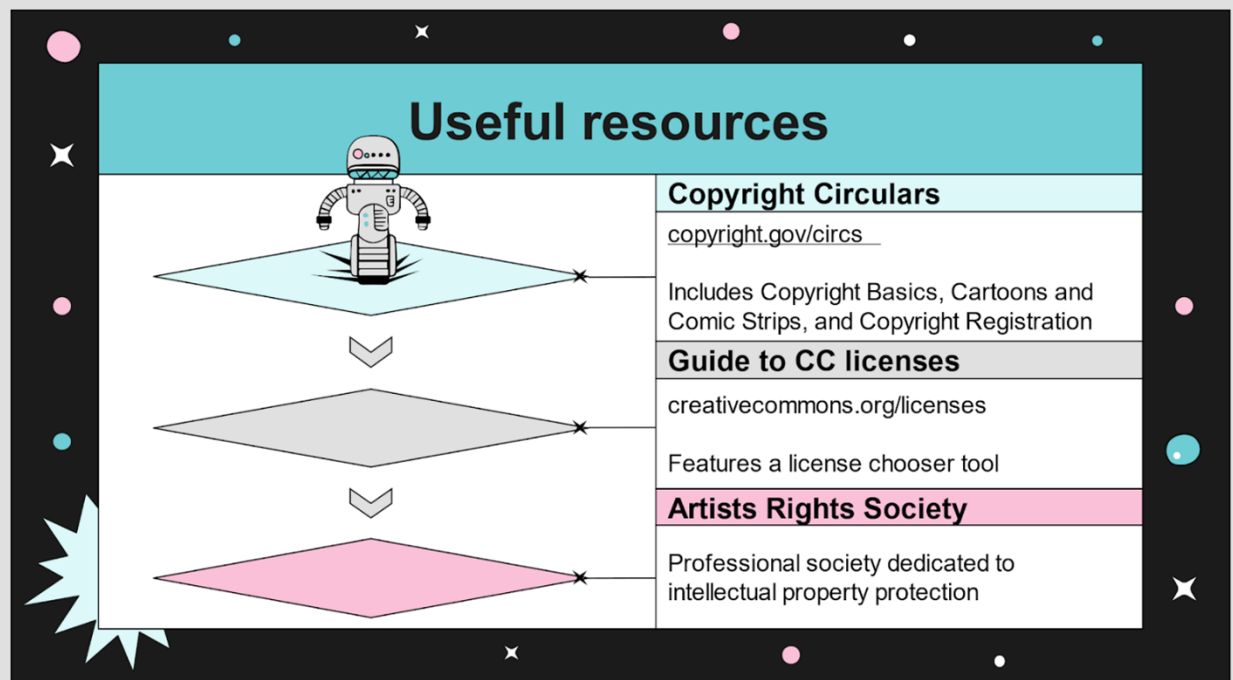


Figure 1 shows our primary resource slide, featuring links to U.S. copyright circulars, Creative Commons licenses, and the Artists Rights Society. These helped direct attendees to reliable post-session reading.

Figure 2
Creator Specific Resources Slide





Useful links – continued!			
	Copyright and Cosplay Copyright and Cosplay: An Awkward Fit: Tinyurl.com/jz833avz		Copyright and Fan Fiction ALA Primer: tinyurl.com/2p99ahzd
	Trademark, patent, or copyright? US Patent and Trademark Office: tinyurl.com/2p9nmp5t		OCEAN Open Copyright Education Advisory Network: tinyurl.com/yc6j8r9x

Figure 2 adds a second layer of creator-specific resources, including information on cosplay legality, fan fiction, trademark law, and the Open Copyright Education Advisory Network (OCEAN).

Figure 3

Copyright Infringement Slide

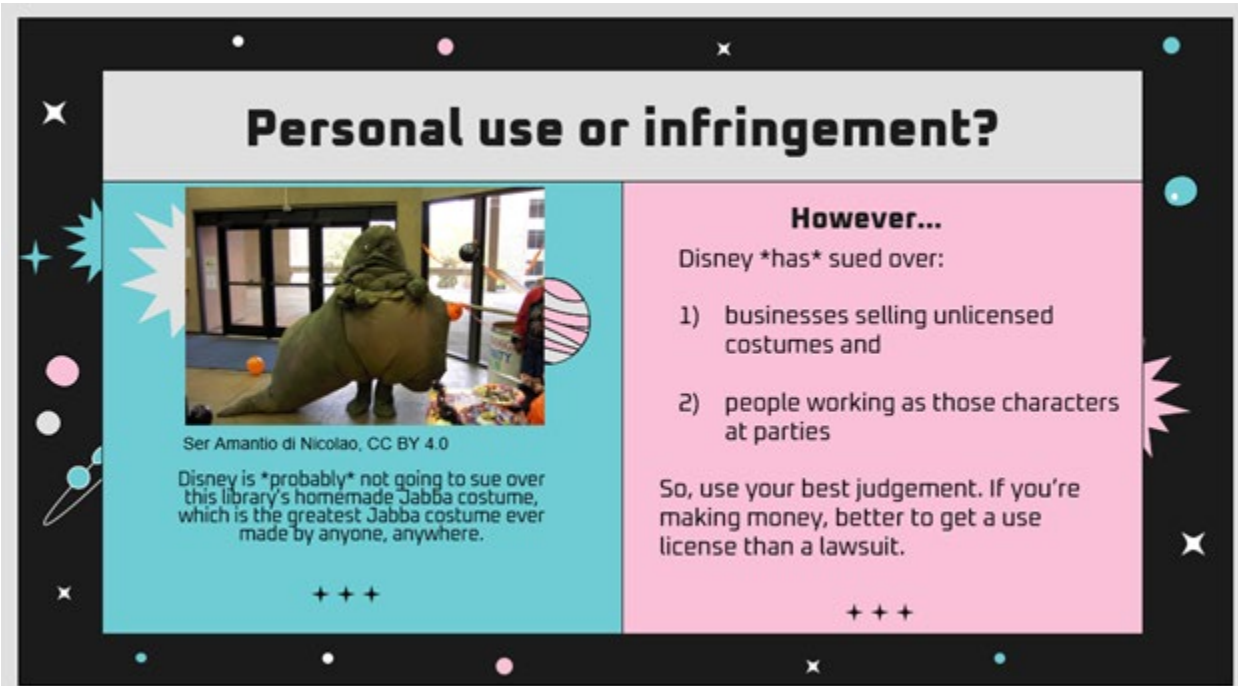


Figure 3 uses visual humor and whimsy to explore the concept of infringement, balancing clear legal messaging with lighthearted tone—something that resonated strongly with audiences.

Figure 4

Best Practices for Creators Slide

Best Practices for Creators	
01	Always list your copyright Whether it's all -rights -reserved or creative commons
02	Watermarks If you're retaining all copyright, consider including a watermark
03	Registering copyright Necessary for fighting infringement in court
04	Resolution If you're retaining all copyright, upload your work at 72 dpi
05	Do your homework! We included some links in the handout – read them!
06	Contact information Make it easy to contact you to request permission/purchase

Figure 4 presents our "Best Practices for Creators" slide, developed in direct response to repeated questions about how to avoid infringement and protect one’s work. It includes tangible advice on copyright notices, watermarking, resolution standards, and registering work for legal protection.

Together, these visuals helped distill complex legal frameworks into digestible, accessible, and memorable takeaways. We observed attendees photographing the slides, asking for copies, and referencing them in post-panel emails.

Challenges and Considerations

While our transition to convention-based outreach brought new energy and deeper engagement, it also introduced several important challenges. Many of these challenges required us to rethink how we communicate risk, scope, and responsibility in public educational spaces.

Clarifying Boundaries: The Legal Disclaimers

Perhaps the most important challenge was managing expectations about our role as presenters. Neither of us hold a law degree, and although we’ve pursued extensive professional development, it’s essential that attendees understand we do not – and cannot – offer legal advice. Even the American Bar Association includes such a

disclaimer on their website, explicitly stating that they are providing information, not advice (ABA, 2022).

Early sessions involved frequent verbal disclaimers, particularly when questions turned from informational to advisory. But this approach often disrupted the flow of the session and left us sounding repetitive. We refined our strategy to instead bookend our presentations with clear, visible disclaimers, reiterating them in materials and on slides:

1. We are not lawyers.
2. We provide legal information, not legal advice.
3. Every case is unique – consult an attorney.
4. If you're monetizing your work, it's especially important to get professional guidance.

We also included a version of this disclaimer on the “Best Practices for Creators” slide (Figure 4) to ensure it remained part of the visual vocabulary of the workshop. This allowed us to strike a balance between approachability and clarity, reinforcing our credibility without overstepping.

Time, Complexity, and Demand for Depth

Even after expanding the session from one hour to two, we routinely ran out of time. Attendees brought layered, real-world concerns that demanded far more than quick answers. Many asked about using licensed characters in products, mixing copyrighted images with original artwork, or distributing derivative content online – all areas that touch on copyright, trademark, and in some cases, publicity law.

The demand for deeper learning has prompted us to consider new directions:

- a possible series of follow-up presentations, each focused on a narrower topic (e.g., fan fiction, cosplay, merchandise law);
- the development of asynchronous materials (e.g., PDFs, LibGuides, annotated slide decks) for continued learning; and
- opportunities to collaborate with intellectual property lawyers on co-led sessions or community clinics.

We're also exploring the use of brief, de-identified case studies to demonstrate how copyright concepts apply in real-life scenarios without venturing into legal advice.

Persistent Confusion: Copyright versus Trademark versus Branding

One of the most common areas of confusion was the distinction between different types of intellectual property. Many attendees used “copyright” as a catchall

term for any kind of ownership or restriction. As a result, we fielded questions that actually fell under trademark law (e.g., logos), rights of publicity (e.g., character likeness), or contractual licensing (e.g., Etsy shop restrictions).

To address this, we created slides that visually delineated these legal concepts and offered examples from the convention context, such as comparing a fan art print of Spider-Man (copyright), a replica of the Batman logo (trademark), and dressing up as Elsa from *Frozen* at children's parties (right of publicity). These examples helped to provide creators with examples of how these concepts might intersect in their own work.

Navigating Risk Responsibly

These encounters highlighted the ethical weight of public-facing copyright education. It is incredibly easy for eager, trusting attendees to mistake information for endorsement. We worked hard to model thoughtful decision-making – emphasizing frameworks, pointing to authoritative resources, and encouraging follow-up with legal professionals.

At the same time, we've come to see that even "just information" has power. For many creators, this may be the first and only time someone takes their copyright concerns seriously. That trust is both a privilege and a responsibility, one we carry forward as we continue evolving this work.

Reflections for Librarianship and Instruction

Convention presentations forced us to abandon the pedagogical autopilot that can quietly creep into repeated workshops. It has been noted that librarians can be hesitant to seek new professional experiences out of fear that these efforts be interpreted as dissatisfaction with the work itself (Weiss, 2023). Articulating these activities as ways to improve existing efforts addresses any such possible responses at the start. For us, rather than relying on existing campus slides, we had to rebuild our materials from the ground up, starting with an honest assessment of our assumptions about our audience's prior knowledge. For the first time in years, we had to ask: *What do people need to know before they can understand this concept?*

To structure our sessions, we relied on the "design egg" model described by Oakleaf et al. (2012), which helped us articulate a clear sequence: copyright foundations first, then application, then problem-solving. The design egg prioritizes outcomes and concepts and identifies core foundational elements. That framework helped us avoid overloading sessions with technical nuance and instead focus on usable, relevant

takeaways. In this framework, the authors categorize possible topics for a one-shot library instruction session as:

- “Enduring Understanding”: the most important outcomes or concepts, amenable to active learning, requiring “uncoverage.”
- The authors further define “uncoverage” as content and concepts not self-evidently obvious, and which probably require hands-on practice and discussion.
- “Important to Know and Do”: outcomes that have direct application in an instructional situation but are not the main focus.
- “Worth Being Familiar With”: Things that are nice to know, but not crucial in this instructional situation (Oakleaf et al, 2012, p. 8).

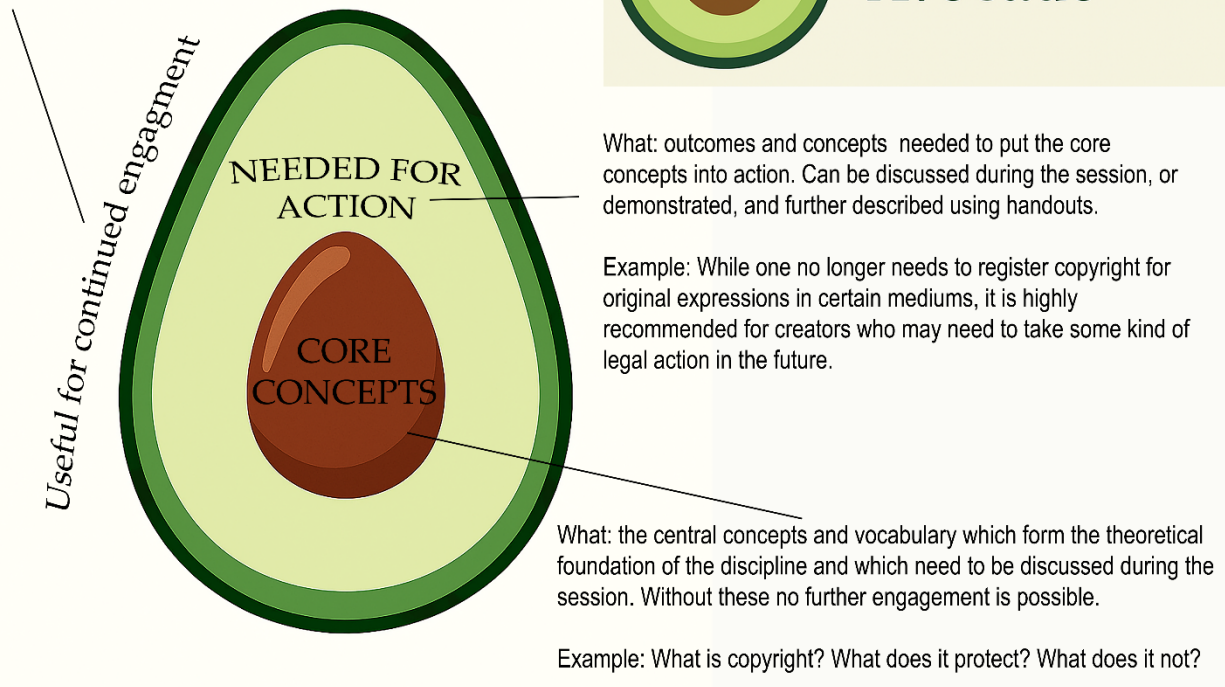
Oakleaf et al. (2012) adapted their egg approach for one-shot library instruction from Wiggins & McTighe (2005), and here we’ve adapted the concept again, adjusting the labels and changing it from an egg to an avocado (Figure 5), primarily because we both like avocados. We also adapted the terminology to something we believed to be more applicable to what we were trying to do for our target audience.

Figure 5

The Informative Avocado for Information Literacy One Shots

What: Useful to know to continue to engage with the topic, in a deeper and more diverse fashion, but not essential to laying the foundation of a one-shot. Can be covered in handouts, links for further readings, etc.

Example: Analyses of legal precedents such as Authors Guild, Inc. v. Google, Inc., or Graham v. Prince.



Note. Adapted from Oakleaf et al (2012).

The Informative Avocado

The design egg model offers a layered approach to instructional content, divided into three categories: Enduring Understandings, Important to Know and Do, and Worth Being Familiar With. This framework is especially useful for helping librarians prioritize what to include in one-shot sessions, particularly under conditions of time scarcity, mixed preparation levels, and ambitious faculty expectations.

Yet, in our work with general audiences, particularly creative practitioners at pop culture conventions, we found ourselves needing to revisit and revise the model. We found that while the “yolk” (core concepts) resonated, divisions felt a bit abstract. For example, the final layer of the design egg, “worth being familiar with,” struck us as

unhelpfully vague. Why was it worth being familiar with? What would familiarity accomplish? What made one concept “worth” retaining in a handout, but not another?

In our view, instructional design should be organized, not just by relative importance, but by practical utility. As such, we developed a revised version of the model more suitable to our goals and audiences: something we call the Informative Avocado (Figure 5). The visual metaphor – a layered structure with a dense, inedible core, a rich middle, and a protective skin – reminds us that not all content has the same instructional weight or function, but that each layer contributes to the overall integrity of the session.

The egg’s nested tiers map neatly onto higher-order thinking goals, aligning well with semester-long courses where scaffolding is possible. In the compressed 50-minute world of one-shot library instruction, we want students to leave with something they can apply immediately. The avocado reframes optional material as enrichment rather than an obligatory tier, reducing extraneous cognitive load and highlighting transferability (the learner’s capacity to apply new knowledge in contexts beyond the session) (Meyer & Land, 2006). In other words, the pit seeds understanding, the flesh fuels immediate action, and the skin invites sustained growth.

Core Concepts

This innermost layer represents the theoretical foundation of the topic, ideas that must be clearly understood for any other instruction to be meaningful. These concepts are nonnegotiable. Without them, no further engagement or application is possible. They define the disciplinary vocabulary, introduce legal boundaries, and clarify structural knowledge.

In our copyright workshops, examples include:

- What is copyright?
- What kinds of work are automatically protected?
- What rights does a creator hold under copyright law?
- What is the difference between an idea and an expression?

These questions are not merely definitional. They form the threshold of understanding that allows learners to proceed into applied decision-making. Without these anchor points, discussions of fair use, registration, or infringement lack context and clarity. For this reason, core concepts always receive dedicated time and active discussion in the session itself.

Needed for Action

This second layer contains concepts that are applied and procedural. This is the knowledge learners need to do something with the foundational material. If core concepts tell you what copyright is, this layer shows you how to navigate it.

Examples include:

- how to register a work with the U.S. Copyright Office,
- why registration is optional but often essential for enforcement,
- what a DMCA takedown is and when it might be used,
- what types of documentation creators should keep, and
- when it's important to consult an attorney or rights organization.

This content is often the bridge between knowing and doing. In one-shot instruction, we may cover these concepts directly (often through demonstrations, examples, or handouts) or we may point to them as essential next steps, using follow-up materials to extend the instruction. Regardless of delivery, these topics are framed as action-oriented: they enable learners to take real steps toward protecting or leveraging their creative work.

While the design egg includes a similar category (“Important to Know and Do”), our version explicitly ties this knowledge to utility. It's not just that these things are “important” – it's that they unlock application. Our workshops frequently include links to registration guides, template language, and tools for creators, because attendees leave with the intent to act. We want to equip them to follow through.

Useful for Continued Engagement

The outermost layer of the avocado is what we call Useful for Continued Engagement. This is material that is not strictly necessary for initial understanding or immediate action, but which supports deeper learning, broader awareness, or long-term growth. These are the conceptual or contextual elements that enrich learners' understanding and help them continue developing their information literacy over time.

Examples include:

- case law such as *Authors Guild, Inc. v. Google, Inc.* or *Graham v. Prince*,
- comparative analyses of copyright and trademark in merchandising,
- academic or critical writing on the cultural role of fair use,
- licensing strategies for collaborative creative projects, and
- historical perspectives on copyright's evolution.

Unlike the “nice to know” category of the design egg, this layer is not defined by passive interest. Instead, it is defined by **intentional enrichment**. These topics matter, but they matter *later* – after foundational and procedural knowledge has been secured. We typically include these in supplemental handouts, resource lists, or LibGuides for attendees who want to keep learning. Their inclusion respects the curiosity of learners without overloading the instructional session or diluting the central message.

The Informative Avocado helps us prioritize instructional clarity, learner empowerment, and knowledge application. It rejects the notion that information is valuable merely because it is interesting or available. Instead, it asks: *What will this enable the learner to do?* In an academic setting, this translates to preparing students to locate, evaluate, and apply scholarly sources in their own work. In a convention setting, it means helping creators understand what protections they already have, where their risks lie, and how to take the next step, whether that’s registration, licensing, or building a more informed creative practice.

By thinking in terms of usefulness and action, we became more efficient and more effective. We learned to structure sessions around core thresholds, streamline supplementary materials, and link everything back to real-world outcomes. And just as importantly, we became better at listening, tuning into what our audiences needed, and refining our categories to reflect that feedback. The *Informative Avocado* is not just a playfully named revision of an earlier model. It reflects our core instructional belief: that the purpose of information literacy is not only to know, but to act.

Rethinking Outreach as Instructional Insight

Starting with the second presentation, we wrote down all of the concepts and topics we covered in our presentations and categorized them according to these three areas. What were the foundational concepts without which no further learning was possible? What were the concepts needed to put that foundation into action? What were the concepts useful for continued engagement and growth?

This instructional rethink didn’t just improve our convention sessions. It carried over to campus workshops as well. Having been forced to rethink the content of our instruction sessions and workshops in this way resulted in cleaner, more direct, and clearer content for our campus audiences. Faculty have responded positively to the changes we introduced after our convention experience: clearer visuals, more explicit scaffolding, and more room for questions. In this way, teaching outside of academia made us better instructors inside it.

When we have a dozen different librarian hats to wear, finding things that work and sticking with them is in many ways a survival strategy. However, the danger in this approach is complacency creep, the slow degrading of quality over time as the same content is repeatedly recycled. Academic outreach work is often cyclical: each semester brings another round of orientations, one-shots, and familiar workshops. Even when the topics change slightly, the format and audience expectations often don't.

Conventions offered us a chance to be more creative in our teaching. Each new venue brought a different energy, audience dynamic, and challenge. We were no longer "delivering" content; we were learning to listen, pivot, and build trust in the moment. There was real joy in that – not just because the attendees were enthusiastic, but because we were learning, too. Stepping beyond institutional routines can breathe new life into your teaching, sharpen your thinking, and connect your work to broader communities that need your expertise. This doesn't require abandoning traditional roles. Rather, it means regularly considering routines to avoid growing stale.

A value of this project was the impact it had on our regular campus workshops. By distilling complex copyright concepts for a general audience, we were forced to examine and often rethink our assumptions about what constitutes foundational knowledge. Teaching in a space where we couldn't rely on academic shorthand or shared disciplinary frameworks meant building our content from the ground up, one layer at a time. That process, in turn, helped us refine our faculty instruction back on campus. We began to see more clearly which concepts needed scaffolding, where learners were most likely to get lost, and how we could structure sessions to move from principles to application more effectively. In essence, by building a knowledge pyramid that worked for a lay audience, we strengthened its base for everyone.

Our experience at conventions challenged us not only to refine our content but to rethink what counts as an instructional opportunity. It reminded us that the core skills we use as educators – curating content, scaffolding concepts, supporting inquiry – are highly adaptable. What changes is the setting, the audience, and the framing.

In this way, outreach becomes a tool for instructional clarity. As we discovered through our convention work, if you can explain something to a lay audience, and if that explanation is effective, then you've likely arrived at the essential knowledge on which to build other concepts. Creative outreach helped us discover what's essential in our teaching, forcing us to articulate ideas more clearly, sequence them more deliberately, and engage with learners more responsively. The lengthy post-presentation discussions with attendees in the hallways outside of the convention room gave us a crowdsourced list of essential foundational knowledge, which in turn

informed our hierarchy. Leaving our usual haunts made us more effective when we came home.

Conclusion

Academic librarianship thrives when it is reflective, adaptive, and connected to the communities we serve. Our journey from faculty-focused copyright workshops to interactive sessions at multigenre fan conventions reaffirmed what we've long believed: the value of our work is not tied to its setting, but to its relevance and responsiveness. The goals that guide our teaching – clarity, empowerment, and ethical engagement – are just as important when speaking to cosplayers and creators as they are in campus classrooms. If anything, stepping into unfamiliar spaces helped us better understand the foundations of what we teach and why it matters.

Teaching outside traditional academic environments introduced us to audiences who were not only eager to learn, but deeply invested in applying what they learned to their creative lives. These were not passive attendees. They were full participants, asking thoughtful, practical, and often urgent questions. In response, we found ourselves reexamining our assumptions, clarifying our explanations, and revising our content in real time. Their curiosity sharpened our instruction. Their trust reminded us that intellectual engagement is not exclusive to academic institutions. These experiences reinforced the idea that effective teaching is not location-dependent; it is listener-dependent.

We hope our experience inspires other librarians to explore unconventional venues, rethink the structure of familiar programs, and consider how their expertise might take new forms outside of academia. This doesn't require abandoning core responsibilities or compromising professional identity. It simply means recognizing when routine becomes stagnation and being willing to try something new. Outreach, when done with intention, can be a site of both community service and instructional renewal.

Whether you're presenting in a lecture hall, a makerspace, or a convention panel room filled with costumed fans, the goals remain the same: to inform, to empower, and to build meaningful connections through knowledge. Sometimes, the most transformative moments in teaching come not from perfect content, but from the willingness to engage an unexpected question in an unexpected space. And often, the best way to deepen our own understanding is to share it – generously, humbly, and in places where it might not normally be heard.

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Appendix A

Presentation Timeline

This timeline highlights the development of our public-facing copyright education presentations across pop culture conventions from 2021 through 2024.

2021

- *Chicago Comic and Entertainment Expo (C2E2)*, Chicago, IL
Isabel participated in a panel on library programming and fandoms—her first pop culture convention presentation. The experience revealed a clear demand for educational programming at these venues.
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2022

- *Planet Comicon*, Kansas City, MO
Isabel presented *Caring for Collectibles* and *Business Skills for Nerdy Librarians* with Marikit Fain (John Brown University).
 - *Anime NebrasKon*, Council Bluffs, IA
Isabel and Marikit presented *Caring for Collectibles*, and Isabel, Marikit, and Charles Fisher (UNO Creative Production Lab) presented *Business Skills for Nerdy Librarians*. Isabel and Craig delivered their first session of *Copyright and Creative Commons for Creators*.
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2023

- *Planet Comicon*, Kansas City, MO
Isabel presented *Caring for Collectibles*.
Isabel and Craig presented an updated version of *Copyright and Creative Commons for Creators*.
 - *Chicago Comic and Entertainment Expo (C2E2)*, Chicago, IL
Isabel and Craig co-presented on *Copyright and Creative Commons for Creators*.
Isabel, Charles Fisher, and Zhihao “Max” Yu (UNO Marketing) presented *Business Skills for Nerdy Librarians*.
 - *Anime NebrasKon*, Council Bluffs, IA
Isabel and Craig presented the updated *Copyright and Creative Commons for Creators*.
Isabel, Charles Fisher, and Max Yu presented *Business Skills for Nerdy Librarians*.
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2024

- *Anime NebrasKon*, Council Bluffs, IA
Isabel and Craig presented an expanded version of *Copyright and Creative Commons for Creators*, incorporating two-hour formatting, survey-informed refinements, and new content on legal distinctions and best practices for creators.
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Appendix B

What to Do when You Don't Have a JD: You Don't Need to Be a Lawyer— Just a Good Librarian

A JD is not a prerequisite for assisting faculty with copyright issues. While librarians may not be experts in all aspects of copyright, they can develop enough familiarity to guide faculty through research on topics such as author rights agreements and fair use, while keeping in mind the all-important disclaimer discussed earlier. While the American Association of Law Libraries (AALL) notes that most law library positions only require a Master of Library Science degree (MLS) and only 20% of law librarian positions require dual degrees, they recommend pursuing additional legal education during library school, rather than after (American Association of Law Libraries, 2023).

That's for law schools, though. What about a go-to person for helping faculty with everyday questions like CC licensing, or fair use? In this case, the AALL doesn't even address the issue. The fact is, for the level of questions most librarians receive in law libraries, as long as they know when to direct someone to an actual lawyer, any librarian can undertake sufficient self-education to be that go-to copyright person. Not expected to have the same level of legal understanding as someone with a JD, this type of librarian is simply adept at helpfully guiding patrons to the relevant legal literature.

Isabel participated in the Open Education Ambassador program at CU Boulder. Both of us are graduates of the Creative Commons Certificate for Educators and Librarians and took part in Harvard's Copyright First Responders program, organized by Creighton University Libraries. We rely on *Copyright Law for Librarians and Educators* by Kenneth D. Crews (2020), widely regarded as an essential reference for those working in this field. In addition, *The Copyright Librarian: A Practical Handbook* by Linda Frederiksen (2015), is a fantastic book and an updated edition is long overdue.

Conferences also play a vital role in professional development. Craig attended the Ball State University Copyright Conference for several years and later founded the Academic Libraries of Indiana (ALI) Scholarly Communication Librarianship Conference, where he curated sessions on copyright and open access for its four-year duration. We both continue to prioritize copyright-related sessions at library and open educational resources (OER) conferences. Suggested options for librarians include:

- The Kraemer Copyright Conference, University of Colorado - Colorado Springs: a well-regarded annual conference focused on copyright issues in higher education, libraries, and research institutions. It offers sessions on fair use, licensing, and emerging trends in copyright law.
- The Miami University of Ohio Copyright Conference: a conference dedicated to copyright education, featuring expert-led discussions on legal developments, scholarly publishing, and copyright literacy for educators and librarians.

- The Creative Commons Global Summit: an international gathering of educators, librarians, activists, and policymakers who advocate for open access and Creative Commons licensing. The summit provides opportunities to engage with global efforts in open education, digital rights, and copyright reform.
- The U.S. Copyright Office Virtual Events and Mailing List: the U.S. Copyright Office offers a mailing list for regular updates on copyright-related webinars, panel discussions, and policy changes. Their archive of past events provides valuable educational resources on topics such as copyright registration, licensing, and fair use interpretations.

There are also numerous online courses and certifications available to gain foundational knowledge of copyright issues. The following list is by no means exhaustive. Rather, it lists the online courses the authors have utilized.

- Copyright for Educators and Librarians (Duke Online): a comprehensive online course offered by Duke University in partnership with Coursera. It covers fundamental copyright concepts, including fair use, Creative Commons, and educational exemptions, making it a valuable resource for librarians and educators seeking to navigate copyright in academic settings.
- Understanding E-Books (American Library Association): a course designed to help librarians understand the complexities of e-book licensing, distribution models, and digital rights management. It provides practical insights into how libraries acquire and manage digital collections.
- Becoming the Copyright Specialist in Your Library (American Library Association): a course aimed at librarians who want to develop expertise in copyright issues. It explores best practices for handling copyright inquiries, supporting faculty and students, and implementing copyright policies in library settings.
- Copyright First Responders: the authors completed their training thanks to Creighton University's offering of an open registration Nebraska edition. (Courtney, 2020).
- The Intellectual Property Law Specialization (University of Pennsylvania Online): a specialization offered through Coursera by the University of Pennsylvania, covering patents, trademarks, copyrights, and trade secrets. This program is ideal for those looking to deepen their understanding of intellectual property law and its implications in academia and creative industries.

Building a Community of Practice

Finding like-minded individuals to form an informal community of practice is invaluable. Isabel and Craig regularly share copyright-related news stories and blog posts, taking time to discuss them at work. However, the most significant factor in becoming reliable copyright resources for faculty has been designing, presenting, and refining copyright workshops and presentations. Teaching reinforces learning, and constant revision strengthens knowledge.

Once you've accomplished these steps, establishing oneself as a faculty resource is a straightforward process:

1. Start with fair use presentations through campus centers for teaching development. In our experience, they're always happy for extra quality professional development material to present to faculty.
2. Build and maintain a LibGuide and direct faculty to it during presentations.
3. Field initial questions. These often come from faculty who attended presentations.
4. Let word spread. Faculty will soon begin reaching out for assistance with copyright-related research.

Undertaking self-education in copyright and related legal issues can feel daunting at first. The terrain is littered with technical jargon, constantly evolving case law, and exceptions that seem to defy easy rules. But it's important to keep perspective: no matter how many webinars you attend or books you read, you won't become a lawyer unless you go to law school—and that's *not* meant to be discouraging.

In fact, this is a strength, not a limitation. Your role is not to offer legal advice, but to support research, facilitate understanding, and know when it's time to bring in a credentialed legal professional. The goal isn't mastery of every statute and ruling, but fluency in the basics: the core ideas of fair use, open licensing, and copyright exceptions that most commonly affect your faculty and students. When you know enough to explain those ideas simply—and to point people toward trusted literature, workshops, or expert advice when needed—you're doing the job.

So, focus on the fundamentals. Get comfortable with the common questions. Seek out learning opportunities, but don't rush. Building your copyright knowledge is a slow and steady process, one that deepens every time you teach, respond to a faculty inquiry, or revisit a familiar concept with fresh eyes. You don't need a JD to be the person faculty trust—you just need curiosity, a solid foundation, and a willingness to keep learning.